

On My Mind
1/04/08

I don't suppose there's any point in looking toward the office of the governor for help, but maybe either the legislature - with new faces in the House - or the Chamber of Commerce would be willing to set up a task force to help those who are now stuck with empty garment factories, barracks and associated facilities to find new uses and new sources of revenue for their land and what sits on it.

Probably the first thing needed would be legal help, to figure out what to do about existing leases that may still apply to the premises. The task force could put together a workshop covering legal issues, options, possible sources of help available to the land owners. The lease/land owners might also want to figure out whether it would be worth more to tear the buildings down and have something else built, or to try convert the existing buildings to some other purpose. The task force could arrange workshops on how to do cost-benefit analyses to help determine the pros and cons.

Then there's the decision of what to do with the buildings, if one decides to let them stand. Here new ideas are needed, and the task force could pull together a workshop that focussed on creativity, on brainstorming, on generating and sharing new ideas.

All of the above - assessing legal implications, determining cost-benefits, generating new ideas - are difficult and expensive to do by one's self. But with guidance, help, organization by a formal group, it would make those tasks a lot easier. It should, as well, provide a boost to the economy, sooner or later, as those facilities are put back into use, and presumably once again generating income.

With both the Legislature and the Chamber starting off under new leadership, the question is how long it would take to get such a project organized.

Since some garment factories sit on public land, maybe this is something the department of public lands could get started - and invite private land owners to participate as well? However it is done, the sooner the better - since there are a lot of idle facilities sitting out there.....

With a clean slate, something else the legislature might want to consider is developing a document that identifies the CNMI as part of the United States. Or maybe that's a federal function? Or the Attorney General's? In any case, I was asked, while checking in for my return to Saipan from my recent trip to Germany, to give the ticket agent proof that the CNMI was indeed part of the U.S. I had a U.S. passport, but it didn't mention the CNMI. I had a CNMI driver's license, and even my voter registration card, but they didn't give any indication that the CNMI was part of the U.S.

I confess I found my predicament funny, but the agent didn't. She said she could get fired if she let someone unauthorized travel to the U.S. Fortunately for me, she finally found proof - somewhere in the depths of her computer, I guess - that the CNMI WAS part of the U.S., because she eventually did check me in and let me get on the plane.

But whoever is responsible, might want to look into it. Maybe it's a Homeland Security issue?

Another need for action that might be facing the new legislature depends on whether the "old" legislature - or rather the old local delegation - over its last six days in office, actually manages to pass the revived gambling bill that has been pre-filed in the House. Should it pass, I would hope the new local delegation members would waste no time repealing, or re-calling or cancelling out in some other way this outrageous second slap in the face to the people in the CNMI.

There appears to be a legal technicality that could be used to prevent the measure from going into effect, should it pass, that lies in a close scanning of the text of the CNMI Constitution's Article XXI: Gambling. The article reads: "Gambling is prohibited in the Northern Mariana Islands except as provided by Commonwealth law or established through initiative in the Commonwealth or in any senatorial district."

Some would read that as providing three means of enabling gambling in the CNMI, but one could also interpret it as providing for only two, since only two of the phrases include a verb phrase indicating how it should be done. That is, it can be PROVIDED by Commonwealth law, or ESTABLISHED through initiative in the Commonwealth. No such phrase accompanies the last part "or in any senatorial district." Thus, the prohibition could be interpreted to say that it would require either a Commonwealth-wide initiative OR an initiative that was senatorial district-wide.

To claim that this section of the Constitution authorizes gambling if simply passed as a law within any senatorial district (without an initiative) would be far-fetched indeed.

That outside investors are working so hard, in both the CNMI and Guam, to see gambling introduced despite public opposition strikes me as rather suspicious. Is it really that profitable? Even so, what kind of people would be so unfeeling as to ignore the social and economic damage that such gambling is known to bring? How could anyone be so heartless as to want to accommodate them? Or is there a more sinister motive afoot here?

Short takes:

I sure hope the publisher of the *Saipan Tribune* adequately compensated his employees for having to work and put out an issue on Christmas Day, and the

day thereafter, and on New Year's Day, and the day thereafter - as the *Variety* employees did not have to. This news junkie greatly appreciated getting a paper on all four of those days - and especially the *Trib's* great New Year's Day issue - but it was painful, nonetheless, to realize that whoever worked to put them out didn't get the holidays off.

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I don't know exactly what day the *Commonwealth Register* came out this month - it usually comes out on the 17th, or one or two days later. Admittedly, I was late in trying to pick up my copy, not going in until the morning of the 24th, but it is more than a little annoying that as a result it won't be accessible to me until Monday, the 7th of January. Seems the person in charge of the *Register* not only moved from the Capitol Hill Attorney General's office to Susupe Attorney General's office, but also took leave over the holidays - which I am not begrudging - and no one else in either office had any idea of where and how I might obtain a copy! Does the AG's office hold its responsibility towards the public so lightly?

Sure, it was holiday time - but the *Register* contains time-dependent material - and sure, I could probably have consulted a copy at the Law Revision Commission Office - but that's not the same as being able to have a copy at hand to read at one's leisure, to refer to as needed.

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The people are being told on a daily basis that the government has no money to spare. Yet someone had to pay for all the post-holes that were dug along the pathway extension in the port area, and for all the new trees - whatever those bare sticks are supposed to turn into - put into the holes, and for all the surveying that was entailed. A couple of weeks' labor of three or four people, and the heavy equipment - a lot of expense in a time of scarcity, seems to me. Presumably, the intent was to provide shade, eventually, for the pathway - a case of good money being thrown after bad, since that stretch of pathway should never have been built in the first place.

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MicSem, publisher of the *Micronesia Counselor*, is asking anyone who has recordings of chants, traditional dance songs, pop island tunes of the 60's or 70's, old church songs, funny songs composed during Japanese times or during the war, to contact them at < micsem@micsem.org >. MicSem wants to copy the music onto disk, which it plans to archive, but would also make available to those who might want it. The organization can also be contacted by mail at P.O. Box 160, Pohnpei, FM 96941 or by phone at 691-320-4067.*

Don't forget the free showing of "Philadelphia Story" starring Cary Grant, Jimmy Stewart and Kathryn Hepburn at the American Memorial Park Theater at 2:00 p.m. this Sunday!

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This will be my last column for a month - the New Year has brought new resolve to try get the papers overflowing so many surfaces in my house reduced

in quantity and the rest into better order - something that takes time I've not been able to give it with my present schedule. Wish me fortitude and some degree of success!

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New movies: only one: "One Missed Call," PG-13, resulting in 3 PG's, 3 PG-13's, 2 R's.